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TAGS: PREL PGOV GG RS
SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA'S MEETING WITH SECURITY COUNCIL DEPUTY
SECRETARY ZUBAKOV

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a June 5 meeting, DAS Bryza and Security Council Deputy Secretary Yuriy Zubakov reviewed the latest developments in Abkhazia and discussed a possible joint effort to improve relations with Georgia. Both agreed that a military solution was not an option. DAS Bryza briefed Zubakov on positive developments in Tbilisi's relationship with Sukhumi, and urged the GOR to make concessions in order to reduce tensions. Zubakov presented a long list of grievances against the Georgian leadership, but agreed that the U.S. and Russia should jointly attempt to move the negotiation process forward. End summary.

Common Language Not Impossible

¶2. (C) Zubakov opened the meeting by stressing the importance of continued U.S. - Russian dialogue. During his recent trip to Tbilisi, Zubakov had met his "old friend" Ambassador Tefft, and had felt the two had understood one other. DAS Bryza reviewed U.S. efforts to normalize direct contacts between the Georgians and the Abkhaz, and to help the two parties overcome the historic animosity and navigate the current delicate situation in and around Abkhazia. He underscored U.S. concern that the GOR, despite its repeated rhetoric of respect for Georgia's territorial integrity, had engaged in provocative actions. DAS Bryza thought that the independence of Kosovo had created an expectation that "something" might happen in Abkhazia. Many in Georgia had feared an impending cataclysm. To complicate matters further, the Saakashvili leadership was contending with a group of hard-liners who would protect Georgian honor at any cost. The hard-liners saw only two choices: to lose Abkhazia through its independence or annexation to Russia or to attempt to regain it via military action. DAS Bryza said that the U.S. goal was to help Georgia make a third choice: to resume direct negotiations with Abkhazia. With many serious professionals in Georgia, including Minister of Reintegration Yakobashvili, urging a moderation on the Georgian leadership, the GOG has begun to talk to the Abkhaz and understand that their ultimate goal was a guarantee of security and of respect for Abkhazian cultural and political rights. DAS Bryza thought that the May 11 Alasania proposal had brought Tbilisi and Sukhumi closer together. The task now was to find a workable formula, perhaps one borrowed from international precedents, such as Bosnia or Cyprus, to ensure that if/when Georgian IDPs return to Abkhazia, ethnic Abkhaz will maintain disproportionately large political rights. DAS Bryza added that each party's concerns, including the return of IDPs, the renunciation of force, and the reduction of forces in the Upper Kodori, would have to be negotiated.

Russia's Turn to Make Concession

3, (C) DAS Bryza said that Russia's willingness to make concessions -- whether it be the removal of paratroops and

their artillery or the discontinuation of railway construction by the Ministry of Defense -- would be immensely helpful in opening a new and promising negotiating process. He emphasized that Russia's "humanitarian" work would have been acceptable and appreciated had Russia consulted first with Georgia and especially if the two countries were to engage in joint projects. The GOR's dispatch of MOD personnel for railway construction in Abkhazia a day after Georgia had announced the discontinuation of UAV flights was not very helpful.

Without Russia, Nothing Goes

¶4. (C) DAS Bryza, recalled that both Abkhaz "president" Bagapsh and the UNSYG Special Representative to Georgia Jean Arnault believed the Friends' Group was "non-functional," and reiterated that the conflict could be solved only if the U.S. and Russia worked together with a strong commitment to a peaceful solution. Without Russia, there would be nothing.

Trusting Georgia: Hardest Thing to Do

¶5. (C) Zubakov said he met with many prominent Georgians during his recent trip to Tbilisi, including President Saakashvili. He expressed concern for the Georgian hard-liners, who tended to make emotional decisions, with no regard for their consequences. He requested that the U.S. attempt to dampen emotion among Georgian leaders. Zubakov dismissed the GOG's list of complaints as not serious. Georgia's grievance about the Joint Control Commission (JCC) for the South Ossetia conflict was not convincing, as the success of any negotiation depended on the commitment of the participants. Zubakov criticized the GOG for pretending that Putin's April 16 instructions had triggered the impasse, although the current "abnormal" relationship had in fact preceded it. Zubakov presented to DAS Bryza a list of Georgian "provocations," including the recent firing on a bus in Gali, where the journalists and TV crew had been "pre-positioned" to record the "event;" and the killing of six Cossacks in South Ossetia. In the latter instance, Zubakov said, the Georgians had quickly changed the clothing of a murdered South Ossetian to make him look like a Russian Cossack. Give that track record, he asked, "How can we trust the Georgians?"

Saakashvili's Policies

¶6. (C) Zubakov maintained that the Georgian leadership should be more cognizant of the negative consequences of its behavior. Saakashvili's intention to settle status before the principle of the non-use of force and confidence building had been established did not work. Zubakov urged the Georgian leadership to study the origins of the 1994 war, and listen more closely to the Abkhaz. As Russia cherishes and loves Georgian culture, the Georgians should learn to respect Abkhaz culture instead of trying to supplant it with their own. He advised never to forget that it was Russia who saved Shevardnadze. Saakashvili claimed that Russia was Georgia's number one threat and had boasted to Zubakov that the whole international community was behind Georgia in its conflict with Russia. (DAS Bryza questioned the validity of such assertion.) In contrast to the GOG's impulsive and provocative actions, the GOR has been transparent and abided by the rules set: in increasing peacekeeping troops it had been careful to keep their number below the ceiling established by the 1994 mandate. Instead of reciprocating the GOR's goodwill gestures, the GOG had endlessly talked about the wine embargo -- which was simply "ridiculous." The Russian market was flooded with counterfeit Georgian wines that required GOR quality control.

¶7. (C) Zubakov noted that Georgian cabinet members rotate with alarming rapidity, and many "competent" professionals were dismissed for no reason, making long-term cooperation based on personal rapport difficult. He lamented the loss of

"respectable" Georgian leaders, with whom the GOG could work effectively, such as former FM Zourabichvili, former Georgian Ambassador to Russia Abashidze and former Russian Ambassador to Georgia Chikvishvili. Where is Salome now?" Zubakov asked, referring to the former Georgian FM, Salome Zourabichvili, who is now working for the opposition. Zubakov said that he had much respect for Yakobashvili and his academic background but Yakobashvili himself admitted to Zubakov that he might not last long. For the time being, Yakobashvili is busy "looking for scholarly justifications for Saakashvili's emotional decisions."

Kosovo Not Yet Finished

¶8. (C) Zubakov warned that the Kosovo settlement was not yet completed and many unexpected results of the forced settlement were in store. He asked DAS Bryza how the West would handle the second largest Moslem country in the heart of Europe. Arguing Russia's policy toward Kosovo based on "tolerance" was more responsible than the West's, Zubakov advised against a hasty imposition of a settlement on Abkhazia.

Defending GOR "Humanitarian" Assistance

¶9. (C) Zubakov defended the dispatch of MOD troops to Abkhazia as a good example of humanitarian work performed by unarmed, disciplined military personnel. The proposal to jointly restore the railway had been rejected by the Georgians a few years ago. The GOR's proposal for a railway connecting Abkhazia with the Russia-Georgia-Armenia railway had also been dismissed by the Georgians. "In the meantime, the Gali district lies in complete ruin," said Zubakov. He claimed that the Abkhaz were entitled to basic human rights including freedom of movement, trade and health care, which the GOR was trying to restore. Georgia should join Russia in its effort to improve the lives of the Abkhaz, rather than continuing provocative actions such as flying UAVs which had only two purposes: military intelligence and improved targeting.

Joint Steps

¶10. (C) Zubakov stressed that Russia welcomed open consultation and dialogue with the U.S., and asked DAS Bryza to publicize the U.S.'s intention to work with Russia on the frozen conflicts, especially through the press. He claimed that even the Georgian press understood the responsibility to inform the public correctly and was ready to help. During his four press interviews -- two with the Russian wire services immediately after the Zubakov meeting -- DAS Bryza had done just that. Zubakov ended the meeting by thanking DAS Bryza for seeking consultations with GOR officials.

¶11. (U) DAS Bryza cleared this message.

RUSSELL